



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
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Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
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Editor: Jan Tendys

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June, 2012

Schedule of Services

Services are held every Sunday at 10:30 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

3rd June Candace Parks The floating life.

Going with the flow sounds nice, until the river tries to kill you.

10 June Rev. Geoffrey Usher "David Copperfield and Religion: Dickens commemorative Service"

This year is the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Dickens, who died on 9 June 1870. Dickens had a strong sense of a social gospel expressed as a continuing and deep conviction of our collective responsibility for the poor and dispossessed.

Geoff Usher has been a member of the Dickens Fellowship for over forty years, first in Adelaide, then in Sheffield (where he became President of the Sheffield Branch), and now in Sydney. He is a Committee member of the NSW Dickens Society, whose book of the year for 2012 is David Copperfield. Some of the religious themes of the novel will be explored in this commemorative service.

17 June Dr. Andrew Usher Lessons from Kindergarten.

After Robert Fulghum's essay "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten".

24 June Martin Horlacher Not *That* Kind of Doctor!

Given all the problems we so often face in this world, we can be forgiven for sometimes just wanting to whizz off in time and space and forget about it all. But, doesn't solving one's own problems include helping to solve those around us?

1 July Helen Whatmough TBA

Seeing ourselves as another saw us (continued).

We continue with another section of E.E. Kellett's A Short History of Religions, first published in 1933. Kellett was not a Unitarian so we have the opportunity to see ourselves from an outsider's perspective.

Emphases by present editor:JT.

Speaking of the English situation, Kellett says: In the orthodox Nonconformist churches there are Unitarian laymen, who, being "sensible men," keep their ideas to themselves.

In America there has been little of this concealment, little need for it. In Boston, the centre of American enlightenment, almost all the distinguished laymen, and the most influential clergymen, fifty or eighty years ago, were Unitarians and avowed it—I was about to say "boldly avowed it," but there was no necessity for boldness. Emerson—in his own highly individual fashion—Longfellow, Charles Eliot Norton (the son of Andrews), Oliver Wendell Holmes, Lowell, and all the elite of that intellectual society, were Unitarians not only in belief but in name. **But by far the most eminent and representative member of the Church was William Ellery Channing, whose moral and religious influence in America was unequalled during the first forty years of the nineteenth century, and whose works were for a long time as well known in England as in his native country. Along with James Martineau, he stands as the chief exponent of modern Unitarian doctrine, and as the best exemplification of its character.**

American Calvinism had been passing through similar phrases to those we have already seen in the English Church; by slow gradations it was moving from orthodoxy to some form of Anti-Trinitarianism, and the Calvinistic doctrines were being shed entirely or greatly modified. Channing felt the influence of the times. Born in 1780, he was brought up in a Calvinist atmosphere, and might have been regarded as a disciple of Jonathan Edwards, the most able and logical of American Calvinist theologians. Edwards's

works are what Coleridge said those of Berkeley and Spinoza are: if the premisses are granted, the argumentation is a "chain of adamant" as consecutive and logical as a demonstration of Euclid. But Channing's nature was not of the kind to be bound in logical fetters: he revolted against the Calvinistic scheme because it appeared to him to lower the character of God; and very early in his career he came out decisively on the Liberal side, for reasons which he afterwards developed in an essay on the "Moral Argument against Calvinism." Against the common doctrine of the Atonement he was equally emphatic, and nothing would make him believe in the total depravity of the natural man. He was a sincere and convinced Anti-Trinitarian, and regarded Christ not as God but as the ideal of humanity, offered by God to us as an example, sinless, performing miracles by virtue of his sinlessness and literally raised from the dead in token of the immortality of mankind and of the future blessedness of believers. Thus, as he often said, he was scarcely a Unitarian, but rather a member of the Universal Church: the somewhat harsh doctrines of Priestley and Belsham he refused to accept.

As will have been perceived, Channing was less of a theologian than a philanthropist and the amazing influence he wielded was due not to his doctrines so much as to his eloquence, his moral fervour, and the transparent beauty of his character. There was not a good practical cause of the time into which he did not put all the energy he could command; and no abuse which he did not fearlessly expose. The annexation of Texas brought forth from him a public rebuke, though Chauvinism and greed were here too strong for him; he was one of the keenest, if sanest of the enemies of slavery—his words, as Longfellow wrote, were like those of Luther, "half-battles for the free"; he was active in the cause of prison-reform, and a worker for temperance. For theological subtleties he had little aptitude. Yet the effect of such a man's life could not fail to win sympathy for the theological views he held: and, mainly through reverence for Channing, Boston became and long remained the centre of a Unitarianism which dominated the religious mind of the whole of New England. It was not, in fact, till the Episcopal Bishop, Phillips

Brooks, appeared above the horizon, that there was any strong opposition to the ruling creed.

Hardly less influential than Channing, and equally distinguished for his support of all good causes, was Theodore Parker, who, however, went further in free thought than Channing, and had finally to separate himself entirely from the Church, and to form a congregation of his own. **Parker's theological views may be roughly summed up as a belief in God, and a profound faith in the ability of the soul to commune with him, combined with a disbelief in supernaturalism as commonly understood.** His nearest English analogue is perhaps Francis Newman, the brother of the Cardinal. The Hebrews had a natural religious genius, and were thus able to grow out of idolatry and anthropomorphism into the lofty monotheism and morality of the later prophets, and to become the leaders of mankind in religious thought: but there is nothing miraculous in their history. The Gospels, similarly, need to be purged of their wonders if we are to gain a true idea of Christ. Christ, thus divested of actual divinity, becomes a man of the highest spiritual insight and of moral perfectness; his words on this side are therefore infallible. But in matters of science, and intellectual things generally, he was subject to ordinary human limitations; his prophecies were guesses, often falsified, and his ideas as to the authority of Scripture were frequently mistaken. Thus, for instance, he was utterly wrong—through ignorance of pathology—as to demoniacal possession.

Many of Parker's views are now freely proclaimed not only by members of the Church which rejected him, but by clergymen of more orthodox societies.

Contributed by Jim Scarfe.

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William Ellery Channing—Quotes

“Reading is the royal road to intellectual eminence... Truly good books are more than mines to those who can understand them. They are the breathings of the great souls of past times. Genius is not embalmed in them, but lives in them perpetually.”

“Difficulties are meant to rouse, not discourage. The human spirit is to grow strong by conflict.”

“To live content with small means; to seek elegance rather than luxury, and refinement rather than fashion; to be worthy, not respectable, and wealthy, not rich; to listen to stars and birds, babes and sages, with open heart; to study hard; to think quietly, act frankly, talk gently, await occasions, hurry never; in a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, grow up through the common - this is my symphony.”

“I laugh, for hope hath a happy place with me; If my boat sinks, 'tis to another sea.”

“The home is the chief school of human virtues.”

“The world is to be carried forward by truth, which at first offends, which wins its way by degrees, which the many hate and would rejoice to crush.”

“The cry has been that when war is declared, all opposition should be hushed. A sentiment more unworthy of a free country could hardly be propagated.”

“Every human being is intended to have a character of his own; to be what no other is, and to do what no other can do.”

And a quote from Theodore Parker

“I do not pretend to understand the moral universe; the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways; I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight, I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.”

From “The Present Aspect of Slavery in America and the Immediate Duty of the North”.

(Both Martin Luther King Jr. and President Barack Obama have referred to Parker’s concept of the moral arc of the universe that bends towards justice).

Contributed by Jan Tendys

Four Questions

We all have periods of spiritual malaise, world-weariness, soul-sickness, times when we feel oppressed by life, or disengaged from things, and we can't quite fathom the reason why. At such times writes William J Bausch (in his book The Yellow Brick Road), we should ask ourselves four questions.

Question 1: When did I stop singing?

He doesn't mean by this: when did you stop picking up the hairbrush and pretending to be Mariah Carey? Or: when did you stop singing a selection of Elvis's greatest hits in the bath? The question goes much deeper and really means: When did you stop singing your own song? When did you surrender your own uniqueness and decide to live an imitative or conformist life? When the voice is stifled the spirit suffers.

Question 2: When did I stop dancing?

This refers to the relationship you have with your body. James Joyce tells us that Leopold Bloom "lived a short distance from his body", and a young man interviewed on television recently announced, "I thought my body was a useful vehicle for carrying my head around." We are taught to feel disgust at our body's odours and secretions, shame at our sexuality, dissatisfaction with our appearance. We are taught to suppress our laughter and to hide our tears. Is it any wonder that we are confused and that we retreat from the body, ignore it, punish it, abuse it, and stop dancing with delight? And yet, according to Walt Whitman, "The scent of these arm-pits (is) aroma finer than prayer." How far away from your body do you live?

Question 3: When did I stop being enchanted by stories?

When did fiction and fantasy lose their appeal? When did you become obsessed by facts and start restricting your reading to biography, history, and natural science? All of these are vitally important, but they don't nurture the soul like stories do. Ask yourself why is it that all the great religious teachers used stories, and why JK Rowling is set to become the first billionaire author in history. What chord has she struck in children (and

adults, too) in her re-working of the old myths? We need history and biography and science, but we need magic and enchantment, too, or the soul withers and dies.

Question 4: When did I become uncomfortable with silence?

When did it become necessary for you to turn on the radio first thing in the morning, play your personal stereo or car radio on the way to work, and sit in front of the television all night? When, as a culture, did we begin to accept piped music in lifts, loud music in pubs? When did we become comfortable with mobile phone noise, road traffic noise, aeroplanes and, police sirens? "I think the intelligence of a person is in inverse proportion to the amount of noise they can bear," writes Schopenhauer. The body craves noise and distraction, but the soul needs silence. So, when you are feeling out of sorts spiritually, when "the world is too much with you", ask yourself these four questions. They just might help you to identify the problem.

BILL DARLISON, posted to Facebook by Danny Crosby and presented by Dr Andrew Usher as part of his address.

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How to Give a Blessing

We're asked a dozen times a day, "How are you?" Most of the time it's not a real question and doesn't invite a genuine answer. It's more like an alternative "hello," and we're well-trained in the ritual response: "Fine, thanks." But every once in a while we are asked this question when things are really not fine at all. At those times when we're walking around in a little bubble of anxiety or sorrow something inside us can suddenly balk at giving out the standard, meaningless answer. We are too hungry for an authentic word, too raw to pretend that things are okay.

The morning after my father died, following three days and nights of an around-the-clock vigil with my siblings, I had to go to the grocery store to buy a few things for dinner. When I arrived at the check-out counter

and the clerk distractedly said, "How are you?" my brain went blank. I couldn't say "fine," or even "okay." I wasn't okay. I wasn't even in my right mind. I was numb, sleep-deprived, and saturated with the mystery of our mortality. That's the only explanation I have, because to my horror I found myself blurting out a real and honest answer. "I'm not so good," I said. "My Dad died last night."

With his hands filled with the apples, chicken, and bread, the poor clerk turned red and started to stammer. The people behind me looked longingly at the check-out lines they should have chosen, the ones that would not have placed them in earshot of the too-much-information lady. I was mortified at having revealed to an unprepared stranger just how not-fine I was.

Everyone froze in this moment of uncomfortable paralysis except the young man bagging the groceries, who had Down syndrome. He stopped moving completely, looked straight at me, and with a little slur and great emphasis said, "I bet you feel really sad about that."

The simplicity of that little expression of kindness and solidarity allowed both the clerk and me to escape. "Yes, I do. Thank you," I said to him, and then I was able to walk out with my groceries and not feel quite so much as though I had just undressed in public. I thought about that encounter for a long time.

The young man bagging groceries would be considered disabled, in thought, speech, and movement. Yet he was the only one able to offer what counted in that particular moment: He knew how to give a blessing.

KATHLEEN MCTIGUE posted to Facebook by Danny Crosby and presented by Dr Andrew Usher as part of his address.

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The Silence of the Stars

When Laurens van der Post one night
In the Kalihari Desert told the Bushmen
He couldn't hear the stars
Singing, they didn't believe him. They looked
at him,
Half-smiling. They examined his face
To see whether he was joking
Or deceiving them. Then two of those small
men

Who plant nothing, who have almost
Nothing to hunt, who live
On almost nothing, and with no one
But themselves, led him away
From the crackling thorn-scrub fire
And stood with him under the night sky
And listened. One of them whispered,
Do you not hear them now?
And van der Post listened, not wanting
To disbelieve, but had to answer,
No. They walked him slowly
Like a sick man to the small dim
Circle of firelight and told him
They were terribly sorry,
And he felt even sorrier
For himself and blamed his ancestors
For their strange loss of hearing,
Which was his loss now. On some clear
nights
When nearby houses have turned off their
televisions,
When the traffic dwindles, when through
streets
Are between sirens and the jets overhead
Are between crossings, when the wind
Is hanging fire in the fir trees,
And the long-eared owl in the neighboring
grove
Between calls is regarding his own darkness,
I look at the stars again as I first did
To school myself in the names of constella-
tions
And remember my first sense of their terrible
distance,
I can still hear what I thought
At the edge of silence were the inside jokes
Of my heartbeat, my arterial traffic,
The C above high C of my inner ear, myself
Tunelessly humming, but now I know what
they are:
My fair share of the music of the spheres
And clusters of ripening stars,
Of the songs from the throats of the old gods
Still tending even tone-deaf creatures
Through their exiles in the desert.

~ David Wagoner ~

(Traveling Light)

On the Grasshopper and Cricket

The poetry of earth is never dead:
When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new-mown
mead;
That is the Grasshopper's—he takes the lead
In summer luxury, - he has never done
With his delights; for when tired out with fun
He rests at ease beneath some pleasant
weed.
The poetry of earth is ceasing never:
On a lone winter evening, when the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there
shrills
The Cricket's song, in warmth increasing ever,
And seems to one in drowsiness half lost,
The Grasshopper's among some grassy hills.

~John Keats ~

Searching for the Dharma

You've traveled up ten thousand steps in
search of the Dharma.
So many long days in the archives, copying,
copying.
The gravity of the Tang and the profundity of
the Sung
make heavy baggage.
Here! I've picked you a bunch of wildflowers.
Their meaning is the same
but they're much easier to carry.

~ Xu Yun ~

(Empty Cloud: The Autobiography of the Chi-
nese Zen Master,
Trans. Charles Luck, ed. by Richard Hunn)

Witness

Sometimes the mountain
is hidden from me in veils
of cloud, sometimes
I am hidden from the mountain
in veils of inattention, apathy, fatigue,
when I forget or refuse to go
down to the shore or a few yards
up the road, on a clear day,
to reconfirm
that witnessing presence.

~ Denise Levertov ~

(Selected Poems)

The Fountain

Don't say, don't say there is no water
to solace the dryness at our hearts.
I have seen

the fountain springing out of the rock wall
and you drinking there. And I too
before your eyes

found footholds and climbed
to drink the cool water.

The woman of that place, shading her eyes,
frowned as she watched—but not because
she grudged the water,

only because she was waiting
to see we drank our fill and were
refreshed.

Don't say, don't say there is no water.
That fountain is there among its scalloped
green and grey stones,

it is still there and always there
with its quiet song and strange power
to spring in us,

up and out through the rock.

~ Denise Levertov ~

Why India's electric fans, frozen peas and women hold key to green economy

By Ed King, 27 April 2012

From RTCC (Responding to Climate Change is a Non-Governmental Organisation and an official observer to the United Nations climate change negotiations).

Leading energy ministers believe a social and economic revolution will be required to ensure goals to reduce poverty and carbon emissions are met in the coming decades.

The UN estimate that nearly one in five people around the world lack access to modern energy services – while more than three billion rely on wood, charcoal or animal waste for cooking and heating.

Yesterday ministers at the annual 23-government Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM) and the UN Secretary-General's Sustainable Energy For All initiative (SE4All) gave their support to a series of measures to promote energy efficiency and empower women.

These included programmes targeting super-efficient fans in India, energy efficiency standards for TVs and fridges, and a US-led project to empower women in the clean energy sector.

US Energy Secretary Steven Chu hailed the agreement at the CEM of 60 appliance efficiency standards – which he said could save 600TWh of electricity, or mean 200 new mid-size power stations would not have to be built.

One standard covers smart refrigerators – which can ensure freezers rest during peak hours and turn on at night: 'your frozen peas won't mind' Chu said.

Another initiative focuses on electric fans in India – numbering in their millions and ubiquitous in shops, houses and public buildings across the country.

Efficient fans use "half the amount of electricity for the same amount of air" according to

Chu – who said developments in this sector could have a major impact across the planet.

"We have to seize on a lot of the opportunities that are before us – these changes are real, they are happening today and we are pushing forward on these changes."

Role for women

The US is also leading an initiative to empower women involved in clean energy development – which includes offering mentors and creating opportunities for women to take leading roles in clean energy and development.

In the US alone less than 30% of jobs in this sector are held by women, and this figure drops rapidly when you take into account global statistics.

Speaking at the CEM, Kandeh Yumkella, Chair of UN-Energy said this was holding clean development back, and contributing to millions of deaths every year – often as a result of cookstove emissions.

Sitting on an all-male panel – Yumkella stressed the need both for women to become involved in the policy making and decision process – and also for developing countries to gain more access to cheap renewable technology.

"Energy poverty is a social problem. This initiative, Sustainable Energy For All looks at economic development, poverty reduction but also climate change, in one holistic manner," he said.

"In seven months since this was set up we have defined three clear targets, which we believe are achievable. Universal access to energy by 2030, improving energy efficiency and doubling renewable energy – that is a message for developing countries as well as OECD countries.

"Developing countries need energy to reach the Millennium Development Goals and to create jobs for their people – the dream of every developing country is to be modernised and have decent jobs for their people."

Jottings

It is always good to see our “senior” members, in this case Rev. Douglas Webster, Peter Berry and Margaret Hoffmann. Judging by how many requests I’ve had for readings given by Andrew Usher to be included in *Esprit*, I’d say his talks have been particularly well received by the congregation.

thanks to Margaret Armstrong who generously gave us some of her books. To past and present members and friends, please send me your news for inclusion in *Esprit*.

Professor JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN’s Visit to Sydney

John Dominic Crossan is a renowned international progressive biblical scholar.

Nine Lecture series delivered over three days, **4 September to 6 September 2012**, 10.30am to 4.30pm. Venue: Pitt St. Uniting Church, 264 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW.
“THE POWER OF PARABLE: HOW FICTION BY JESUS BECAME FICTION ABOUT JESUS”

A major Public Address exploring a Christian theology of the Bible, 7.00 pm on **September 7, 2012**. Venue: Pitt St. Uniting Church, 264 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW. “IS GOD VIOLENT? HOW TO READ THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE AND STILL BE A CHRISTIAN”
www.commondreams.org.au

Do you have a topic of a spiritual nature that you would like to share with the congregation?

As Unitarians, we support an “Open Pulpit” and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish.

Just let Ginna or Caz know what you would like to speak about and when you are available and we will fit you into the schedule.

Also, please feel free to give us your feedback on any of the services. This is the best way to ensure the services address the needs of the congregation.

Would you care to join us? Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter.

If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring 9428-2244, consult our website sydneyunitarians.com or speak to one of our members before or after the Sunday service. Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee.

If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for publication.

It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Jan by the 15th of each month.

Variations to this timetable may be necessitated by circumstances.

Preferred method is as an MS-WORD attached to email to jtendys@bigpond.com

Hardcopy submissions can be hand-delivered to Jan or posted to:

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